

SUPERIOR GENERAL REPORT TO THE ASSEMBLY

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Introduction

As I wrote in my letter to you on 30 March, Saint Vincent loved to be with the confreres and to hear their stories and their striving to make the gospel better known to the poor both in word and action. He loved to offer his encouragement.

My brothers, delegates of this 41st General Assembly, this is what I hope to do in this report and it is also my hope that we offer encouragement to one another as we gather in this Assembly.

As we are all aware, our focus for this Assembly is the mission itself. The motto that we selected “350 Years and Beyond, the Mission Continues,” has reminded us of our journey. The particular theme that we have selected is Constitution 2: “... faithful to the gospel, attentive to the signs of the times, open up new ways and use new means, remain in a continual state of renewal.” This helps us to be attentive to the direction we want to take with the help of the Holy Spirit. Our goal: creative fidelity to the mission.

In my report I would like to indicate a number of actions undertaken by myself, members of the curia, my general council, and confreres throughout the world, as well as other members of the Vincentian Family, as examples of where “creative fidelity to the mission” happens. I hope that by way of this report an open and respectful dialog will occur aimed at moving our hearts and our hands into action filled with a passion for Christ and passion for the poor.

Visits and Special Events

One of the ways I have experienced the charism alive and well has been in my visits to the provinces and at the same time visits to the Daughters of Charity and other members of the Vincentian Family throughout the world. I first want to present statistics of the number of countries I have visited by continent and the number of times visited.

Those of us who participated in the General Assembly of 2004 heard my predecessor, Father Bob Maloney say that he did not consider that the visits to the provinces were of utmost importance for the Superior General in these times. He had chosen to be the spiritual animator of the Congregation through the written word, which he did quite well because we continue to hear from time to time and in different places throughout the world quotes from many of the inspiring messages that Father Maloney had written either to the Congregation or to the Vincentian Family in general. However, I do not consider myself to be a writer, and I said that from the very beginning. I chose to carry out my role as spiritual animator of the Vincentian Family, particularly the Congregation of the Mission, through my visits to the different countries. We as a congregation are in 84 countries. I have visited 73 of these countries which included all of the provinces and vice-provinces. I was unable to visit 11 countries. I also visited 7 countries where we are not present but the Daughters of Charity are, many of those being isolated places.

My reason for choosing to animate spiritually through the visits is that it coincides with who I am as a missionary. I am used to living out of a suitcase and to moving from here to there. At the same time, after having been recently elected I asked the different visitors what they would want of me as their new Superior General. A good number of them if not the majority asked that I might visit. For many of the places it was the first time in 18, 19, 20, 21 years that a Superior General had visited. My reflection on these visits, as I have alluded to here already, has given me the opportunity to see the charism alive and well. Experiencing that first-hand encourages me to share with others in order that they too might be animated to serve in a deeper way the call we have received from our Founder Saint Vincent de Paul.

During a Council evaluation one of the Assistants pointed out that he felt that my visits tired me out and made me sometimes a bit on edge at our Council meetings. My response to him was the contrary. I returned from the visits to the different countries full of energy. Often what drained my energy were the long hours of work in the curia itself and the tense situations of discussion that were carried out around the council table. One might claim that the image I get of the Congregation or of the Vincentian Family in these visits is always the best picture because everyone would put on their "Sunday Best" for the visit of the Superior General. Most likely that is the case. And yet it says what we are capable of being and doing.

I participated in a number of significant celebrations which you will see highlighted in the pictures that will follow. It gave me the opportunity not only to experience the mission as it is, but also to

hear its history, the richness of the service in the evangelization provided. It also made me see the challenge; it is to inculturate ourselves where we are called to be good news to the poor. Perhaps that is something we have failed to do from time to time, transporting just our own ways of living, setting up mini-colonies and missing the opportunity to relate in a deeper way, sharing the gospel with those whom we serve. We can be inspired by many of our great saint missionaries who were able to inculturate themselves in order to be that good news. As one model I hold up Justin de Jacobis, whose 150th anniversary of death we are celebrating this year.

These special events also gave me the opportunity to see the good collaboration that takes place among the members of the Congregation of the Mission, the Daughters of Charity and other branches of the Vincentian Family. At the same time I see this continues to be a challenge.

Since it is the Assistants who normally did the canonical visits to the different provinces, I carried out only three canonical visits: the Provinces of Hungary, Madrid and Austria. My interest in these canonical visits, as well as hopefully all the canonical visits that were carried out by the Assistants, was to be a faithful listener to the spirit of the Lord expressed in the lives of each of the members of each province or vice-province visited. Of utmost importance for me is something that Father Hugh O'Donnell said in the Visitors Meeting in Mexico when speaking about ongoing formation; he said: "Our greatest resource is ourselves." Therefore we need to put attention and energy in one another in order that we might be faithfully creative in carrying out our mission.

I was honored to be present for the raising of the Vice Province of Eritrea, Saint Justin de Jacobis, to a Province showing the maturity that the confreres had attained in becoming independent as a province and yet interdependent in terms of collaboration in carrying out the mission with the worldwide Congregation and the Vincentian Family. In October the Vice-Province of Nigeria will be raised to a Province as well.

I was present for the reconfiguration of the new Western Province of the United States that occurred January 25 this year. One of the reflections made by its new visitor, Father Perry Henry, was that each of the three provinces that now comprise the new Western Province had developed over the years its own culture and its own style and methods of carrying out evangelization. Rather than see that as an obstacle in coming together, he considered it to be a richness, a way of enriching ourselves with the differences and gifts and cultures that have been developed. Would that we all would be able to see the

question of reconfiguration precisely in that light, an opportunity to enrich ourselves in order that we might in turn enrich those whom we are called to serve.

At the beginning of my mandate I made an attempt to visit and be present at all the meetings of the different Conferences of Visitors and/or Provinces, recognizing the importance of this dimension that although not yet a legal entity has charismatically sprung up as a way of carrying out more effectively our mission to evangelize the poor. I visited also a number of the interprovincial internal seminaries and the like, again recognizing the importance of collaboration at the interprovincial level in formation and other areas.

As mentioned at the beginning I also visited a number of countries where the Daughters of Charity are, but not the Congregation of the Mission. In many of those experiences I received a petition from both the Daughters and the Bishops to accompany our Sisters as well as the rest of the Vincentian Family and the poor whom they serve. I found that where there is collaboration among the Congregation, the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentian Family, a much more dynamic, much more alive experience of the charism occurs.

Take a minute or two now to reflect on what I have said, listen to some music and see some pictures of the different special events that I have mentioned and jot down any questions or comments you may have.

Initiatives

In this second part I would like to focus on some new initiatives that have taken place and some building on previous initiatives.

At the level of the General Council, we created a plan of action over a period of five years which was reviewed regularly. At the same time I initiated an annual evaluation of the performance of the roles of each of the General Assistants as well as of the Superior General, something that was painful at times. I think that it is important, especially if we are called to reflect on and evaluate the Congregation, we ourselves should be capable of evaluating our own performance and service.

With the guidance of the Assistant for Missions, an office was set up and Statutes for the International Missions were developed. This was a new development coming from the fact that, in my opinion as Superior General, the role of the Assistant for Mission has changed. As the Constitutions themselves state: *“One of the Assistants General has a special responsibility for the foreign mission.”* As one reflects on the nature of the Congregation today, it is hard to say

where those foreign missions are. Taking into account some of the most recent documentation of Pope Benedict, when he speaks about *mission ad gentes* he is speaking not about far away places that have never heard the Word of God, but those places, even close by, that need to hear once again the good news proclaimed. In one sense, it seems to me very difficult to define which of our provinces are foreign missions. In the previous administration, Father Victor Bieler, who continues to be an active missionary in our international mission in the Solomon Islands at 80 years of age, was energetic in visiting many of the provinces, far more than any of the other Assistants who accompanied the Superior General.

My intention was to change that dynamic and give to each of the Assistants a sense of the whole of the Congregation of the Mission. Thus there was the need to change the dynamic of the Assistant for Missions. I congratulate Father Ubillus for a job well done in making a special effort to be in contact with different missionaries, offering workshops and seminars, opportunities to participate in sessions developed by different entities of the Church, sending out articles particularly during the times of Advent and Lent of a particular missionary nature.

There was also the creation of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change and the continental workshops that followed: in Mexico and Brazil for Latin America, Cameroon for Africa and Bangkok for Asia. There is one to be celebrated yet in Illinois for the United States. I consider this Commission to be one of the most significant new initiatives of this administration. The idea was taken from my predecessor which I made an effort to put into practice, expanding it to include not only members of the Congregation of the Mission, but other members of the Vincentian Family with the desire to do "mission" and do so in a collaborative way.

The word "Systemic Change" in itself has been difficult for some people to understand and some say it does not exist in their language. That is not the case; it exists in all languages; we just may not know that it does. Hopefully many of you have had or will have the opportunity to participate in one of these workshops on the promotion of systemic change. In my opinion it is a most concrete way to live as missionaries today, motivated by that which identifies who we are: charity; but charity that is not a hand out, but rather a hand up, as so well yet so simply stated by a confrere. Charity includes personal contact which has to be ever present in our realization of our mission as well as the promotion of human dignity and an involvement in what we call political charity. This was well spelled out in one of the issues of *Vincentiana*.

Out of the Commission for Promoting Systemic Change came the awards for systemic change projects as well as mission projects for the Congregation of the Mission. There are also special awards for systemic change projects of the Vincentian Family. It has been our experience that over the years since the Systemic Change Award and the Mission Award were presented, the understanding, the implementation and the realization of these projects has improved promoting creativity in evangelization and in the service of the poor.

Another initiative was meetings with the presidents of the Conferences of Visitors and /or Provinces which we had twice. Hopefully the new administration will continue this experience, because it is a way in which we have a greater sense of who we are and what our common mission is.

Another initiative was the workshop for Confreres in Difficulty. Although many had difficulty with the title itself, it was the best name that we could come up with. I would like to say something in light of this workshop. I repeat, our main resource is ourselves. In the workshop our intention was to help the visitors and others respond to the situation of confreres and at the same time to help clarify the relationship that they have with the Congregation of the Mission, not only spiritually but legally as well. To say that the question regarding sexual abuse is restricted to one particular country as some of us may have thought, is obviously not true; it is a reality that affects all of us throughout the Congregation of the Mission and in every country where we are present. Therefore we have an urgent need to respond as best we can not only to the confrere who goes through this experience or who suffers from pedophilia, but also a concern that has to be real regarding the victims. The question of abuse is very costly economically speaking as well. It hurts to have to spend many thousands and thousands of dollars when we know that the money that we have as a Congregation of the Mission is not ours but the patrimony of the poor. We hope to dialog about this issue here in the Assembly in different moments. I recommend the next administration deal with this issue at different levels, whether at the Visitors meetings, the Conference of Visitors and/or Provinces meetings, the new Visitors Meeting as well as in the General Council itself to update the Guidelines.

With regard to SIEV, which is one of the offices of the Congregation, a new initiative that we have taken was naming an Executive Secretary to assist the coordinator. It was Father Suescun, and I congratulate him on the support that he has given to Father Alexander Jernej, the coordinator. One of the most significant events that they were able to put forward in this period was the session for

new Vincentian scholars. Hopefully we will be able to maintain and develop this dimension of the SIEV. In my opinion it is one of the ways to deepen our Vincentian culture.

Other new initiatives: a desire for better communications between the center and the rest of the provinces, which, to be honest with you, has not always been easy. I think we have been faithful to getting the information out to the confreres, but because of different circumstances, and I certainly understand this, the communication back and forth has not always been fluid. One of the attempts of bettering communication was the creation of the new web page specifically for the Congregation of the Mission, cmglobal.org, as well as the uniform e-mail addresses for easier communication with all the provinces, the visitors, their secretaries, and their economies.

Let me take a moment to express something that, in my opinion, reflects the need for deepening communication between the provinces and the Superior General. There have been a number of different incidents that have occurred over these last six years where I have been informed by others outside of the Congregation of the Mission of significant matters that involved confreres in the Congregation of the Mission, which as you can imagine was very embarrassing. I will give you a concrete example, not mentioning names, but it happened on any number of occasions. Sister Evelyne would say to me, Father, is it not it a shame that such and such situation has occurred with Father so and so. And I would have to say, Sister, I am not quite sure what you are talking about. Then I would receive details of the situation of which I had not been informed by the visitor himself. And I am talking about significant matters. There is a need to deepen our sense of being one through greater communication that needs to flow not only from the center to the provinces, but from the provinces to the center especially concerning major issues.

It is not that I desire a centralization as strong as may exist in the Daughters of Charity. But certainly more than what presently exists. I hope this occurs in the next administration. Certainly this is our encouragement, that we work toward a greater unity rather than being loosely linked to the center. It is in this light that I have spoken often of the importance of the internationality of the Congregation of the Mission. Those who participate in the CIF program, of which I will be speaking shortly, have the opportunity to experience the internationality and its richness. When we are able to share ideas and visions that go beyond our own limited areas and cultures, it is always a growth producing experience. It is not easy, but certainly important.

Another initiative was the creation of new patrimonial funds which the Econome General as well as the Director of the Solidarity Office will be speaking more in depth. It certainly is where we recognize the generosity of the provinces, especially towards those who do not have the resources necessary to carry out their mission in a creative way. Those “who have,” have been generous in giving to those “who have not.” Here, even in this matter, I would hope that we could achieve an even greater degree of equality. Sometimes you get the impression that those “who have” resources also have power in decision-making processes and often you sense inferiority from those who “do not have,” in terms of participation in these processes. Obviously this is a challenge where we need to move forward.

Take a minute now to reflect on some of the things that I have said as again you listen to some music and see some pictures and jot down your thoughts.

Ongoing Formation

We have continued with the previous administration’s practice of ongoing formation for new Visitors, having had a session in 2006, 2008 and 2010 which I find the need to make more practical and less theoretical. I am appreciative of the wonderful work that Father Corpus Delgado has done, having helped create the program and moderating it since its beginning. Corpus would take seriously the evaluation of each of the sessions and develop the new workshop based on the recommendations made.

Another new initiative is a Money Management workshop for provincial economies that Father John Gouldrick, our Econome General, has put together. The first one was realized in the Philippines for the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference.

Another new initiative is a workshop for new Directors of the Daughters of Charity. This came as a way of concretizing a Directory for the Directors of the Daughters of Charity that was initiated in the previous administration and enacted in the present. There have been three workshops for new Directors. For me it has been important that I be present throughout the whole of those meetings. Sister Evelyne and a good number of her Council members participated in all the workshops from beginning to end in order to assist the new Directors. I am grateful to Father Javier Alvarez for organizing and executing, together with different team members, these workshops that have been fruitful.

With regard to our own CIF program, besides the programs already developed that we have maintained, that is, the three-month

program as well as the heritage program of one month, the Directors set up a program for leadership that was presented first to the superiors and superiors to be, then a second time for visitors and members of their councils. I am appreciative of the good work that was done on that workshop with the help of Father Hugh O'Donnell, the former Director of the CIF program, and now the new team, Father Marcelo Manimtim and José Carlos Fonsatti. A new program which was just completed not too long ago is for the ongoing formation of Brothers in the Congregation of the Mission. Rather than say more about how successful this program was, I will ask Brother Paco, who is a delegate here at the Assembly, to come forward and share with us briefly his impressions and the actions that occurred in that CIF session for Brothers.

After having heard that reflection from Brother Paco, let us take a few moments to reflect on what we have heard in this section on ongoing formation reflecting and jotting down your thoughts.

International Missions

With regard to our international missions, of which we now have four, I would like to say the following and at the same time make some comments about some of the missions throughout the Congregation.

As a new initiative regarding the mission of the Solomon Islands, we have worked out an agreement with the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference. They have been collaborating significantly in the development of that mission. We continue to make requests for confreres beyond Asia Pacific to supply missionaries to continue this good work of seminary formation and evangelization. Since the establishment of the international mission in the Solomon Islands as well as Papua New Guinea, we have begun to receive vocations. The Province of Australia has generously assumed the responsibility of the formation of these candidates in the name of the Asia Pacific Conference. Presently we have five missionaries in Solomon Islands. Father Raul Castro from the Province of Argentina is in process and preparation for the mission and is awaiting his visa. We have a number of confreres who give of their time on a part-time basis teaching courses for a semester or a number of months as has Father Drago from the Province of Slovenia, who has also contributed to raising money for the continuation of this mission. A thank you to Father Drago. We do need the help of Scripture Scholars in the Solomon Islands as well as other missionaries. The recommendations we are making to the new administration is to continue these requests in the October appeal.

In Papua New Guinea we have three missionaries; the fourth, who was one of the original members has been named the Visitor of the Province of the Philippines, Father Rolly Santos, who is here present with us. We are waiting for visas for two confreres, Father Georges Maylaa from the Province of the Orient and Father Emmanuel Lapaz from the Province of the Philippines. I have heard there that we have had promises of other missionaries from other countries. We also have a lay missionary from the Philippines who is awaiting his visa.

With regard to the international mission of El Alto, Bolivia, as we know it is a very difficult mission and it has gone through a lot of growth pains and a reconfiguration. At this present time we have in El Alto four missionaries, two in a rural missionary parish and two in another. We have opened a new mission in Cochabamba, Bolivia, with two confreres, Father David Paniagua, the former Director of the Daughters of Charity of Bolivia from the Province of Chile, and Father Joel Vasquez, who is currently the Director of the Daughters of charity in Bolivia, from the Province of Colombia. The hope is to expand the mission with more personnel once it gets underway.

I have also received requests over the years from many bishops for missionaries in different places, particularly in Brazil and in Africa. One of the most recent is from a bishop in Angola whose diocese is centrally located with regard to the three missions of the Daughters of Charity there. It also happens to be the diocese that has the least amount of priests. I am recommending to the next administration that they consider this as a priority when we are able to open up our next mission.

The Visitors Conference of Africa, COVIAM, has been working for the last couple of years on beginning a new mission in Chad, hopefully in conjunction with the Daughters of Charity. I have encouraged COVIAM to assume this responsibility and to do so in the simplest of ways. They have the General Council's 100% support as they move forward being creatively faithful to the mission.

Other provinces as well have undertaken new missions in these years. Among those are Kazakhstan of the Province of Poland as well as the desire on the part of the Province of Saint Justin de Jacobis to open a new mission in Sudan as part of their commitment to the 350th. With regard to missions, I would like to close my reflections on this section with the situation in mainland China. As we all know, this is part of Province of China and has its base of operation in both Taiwan and the mainland. Yet on a number of occasions the former visitor as well as the current visitor of China have asked for assistance for further developing the missionary efforts in mainland China. It would be my hope that it can be further developed

concretely by the Province of China working with the Asia Pacific Visitors Conference and other recommendations that might come out of this General Assembly since the Province of China and their provincial council have requested that somehow the issue be discussed here. Hopefully it will be, perhaps in the continental sessions and in other moments where it is appropriate. It is of great importance for me as for the previous administration to have a continual effort of preparing ourselves to evangelize in mainland China.

Let us take a few minutes to reflect on what I have said regarding international missions and missions of other provinces with music and pictures to accompany. Please jot down your thoughts.

Vincentian Family

A new initiative arising from our efforts to work together as a Vincentian Family has been the creation of the Executive Committee for the 350th anniversary of the death of our Founders with its five commissions. Specifically the intention of this Committee, which is drawing to an end with the closing of our Jubilee celebration September 25 in the Basilica of Saint Peter's in Rome, has been to deepen our own Vincentian spirituality and our sense of being Family through greater efforts of collaboration

One of the concrete outcomes of the 350th was the decision by the international heads of the Vincentian Family to set up a micro credit pilot project in Haiti that we will hear more about from Father Bob Maloney later on this week when he speaks to us. The project in itself is a concrete expression of systemic change and hopefully it will help us to understand it more clearly. The earthquake in Haiti has certainly made providential our wanting to respond as a Vincentian Family to the situation of poverty there.

In order to show how important collaboration is for me, I use the image of us sitting at the table, equally sharing in the charism of Saint Vincent de Paul, having Christ at the center and evangelization and service of the poor as our common goal.

I have participated in General Assemblies of all the branches. I was at the General Assembly of the Daughters of Charity in May 2009. I may be in two General Assemblies of Vincentian Marian Youth: one was in Paris in 2005 and the other will be Lisbon, Portugal following this General Assembly It all depends on who the Superior General is which determines who the Director General will be. I have participated in two Assemblies of MISEVI, one in Berceau and the most recent one in February of this year in Colombia. I have also participated in two international meetings of the Association of

the Miraculous Medal, one in Rome and the most recent this past November in Paris.

A few comments on each of these branches that are closely connected with the Congregation of the Mission. Need I say with regard to the Daughters of Charity that we should have a very close relationship. Minimally, our Constitutions establish that. But I have to admit that as Father Maloney once said, and it continues to be our experience, it is more difficult to name a Director of the Daughters of Charity than it is a Visitor. One of the reasons is that we do not know well enough the charism of the Daughters of Charity and confreres do not feel prepared to accompany them. That is a fault on our part that we need correct. I recommend that for the future in our programs of formation, young men have an opportunity to know better the charism of the Daughters of Charity and to work closely with them. This is our role in the unfolding of the charism, called to be like that of Vincent with Louise, complementary in the evangelization and service of the poor. As I mentioned earlier, where there is good collaboration there is energy and enthusiasm. And where there is not, the poor suffer.

With regard to the Vincentian Marian Youth, the international president will speak to us later on in this Assembly. VMY as well as MISEVI and the Association of the Miraculous Medal are not independent associations, but are apostolates of the Congregation of the Mission and the Daughters of Charity and we are called to respond accordingly in their development.

With regard to MISEVI, it has been struggling in its growth over the years, but not because there is a lack of lay Vincentian missionaries. As I go throughout the world, I see a great number of lay Vincentian missionaries. But they are not connected to MISEVI for a number of different reasons, which we addressed in our most recent Assembly in Colombia. My hope is for those who are lay Vincentian missionaries to come under the umbrella of MISEVI. Some have restricted it to mean only lay missionaries in *mission ad gentes*. But as I mentioned earlier, Pope Benedict has helped us to understand *mission ad gentes* as something much wider. We mean to say that MISEVI is for all lay Vincentian missionaries.

With regard to the Association of the Miraculous Medal, it is growing. In its most recent Assembly we reworked the Statutes to make them more inclusive of all the different efforts that are taking place for promotion of the Miraculous Medal throughout the world. The uniqueness about the Association of the Miraculous Medal is that it is an Association of which all can be active members. It is not just a lay Association, but an Association that involves confreres,

Daughters of Charity, other religious men and women, all with the concern of promoting devotion to our Blessed Lady.

I recently participated in the General Assembly of the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul in which the first non-European president in its history, Mr. Michael Thio from Singapore, was elected. Over these years I have seen tremendous growth in the Society and it has a quality of leadership that, in my opinion, is to be honored and respected. We will witness an example of that because one of the vice-presidents of the Association will be speaking to us in this Assembly.

With regard to AIC, I participated in two international Assemblies, one in Santo Domingo and the other in Rome. It continually impresses me in my different visits throughout the world, their commitment as women to work with women who are poor.

Another initiative with regard to the Vincentian Family: Every year, traditionally, since the previous administration, there have been meetings of the international leaders of the Vincentian Family. In this administration we have added a new element, that is inviting a different branch or branches of the Vincentian Family to participate and to share with us how they live the charism today. As a result, the international meetings have grown in size making it a bit difficult to exercise any kind of decision-making. As a result I made the recommendation that was accepted by the leaders of the Vincentian Family, to form an Executive Committee made up of the Daughters of Charity, the AIC, the Society of Saint Vincent de Paul, and the Congregation of the Mission. They would meet on a yearly basis to take any suggestions of the Vincentian Family leaders and/or to make recommendations or decisions. Particularly important is the decision-making process for this Committee regarding the Vincentian Family Executive Board that operates in the micro credit project in Haiti. One of the principal reasons that I together with the Delegate for the Vincentian Family, Father Ginete, have decided to invite new members of the Vincentian Family is to see the charism alive and well beyond our traditional branches. It is good for us to see this dynamism which can enrich us and encourage us to be evermore creative in the mission.

It is delightful to see how these different branches, some 260 associations or congregations, lay or religious that are connected with the charism of Saint Vincent, are desiring more and more to have Vincentian formation, to drink from the Vincentian spirit and charism, and to do so as a Family. I want to encourage us to be at the forefront together with the Daughters of Charity and the other traditional branches to promote this. When we are possessive of our

charism we only cause harm, and mostly to those who are the beneficiaries of who we are, those who live in poverty.

Now, let's take some time to reflect on some of the things that I have said to you, with photos as we listen to the music that accompanies it.

Further Concrete Recommendations for the Future

Let us begin *ad intra*, that is with regard to the curia and general council itself. One of the things I discovered at the beginning of my service is that the curia is overly centralized. As a result I have attempted to restructure that since everything is centralized in the Superior General, everything passes by his desk. What I have attempted to do is a greater distribution of the responsibilities, particularly among the Assistants, but also with other members of the curia. For example, if information arrives from a particular province, I assure that a copy of that goes to the Assistant and one to myself. I would hope that the Assistant would give recommendations as to how we might treat the issue. It has worked to some extent with some of the Assistants but not in every case.

I recommend to the new administration that there be an increase of one Assistant. That means that the Vicar General and rather than three Assistants, four Assistants. With this there is no need to change our Constitutions, because it is clearly stated in 116 § 2: "*The Assistants General, at least four in number...*" My recommendation is that we have an additional Assistant, and that each Assistant be assigned different responsibilities besides the canonical visits.

I recommend that the Vicar General be responsible with the Procurator General of the Congregation for confreres in difficulty. This should be a priority for the next administration. As I have said, our main resources are the confreres and we need to care for them as best as we can.

We have an Assistant for Missions as Statute 57 states: "*One of the Assistants General has a special responsibility for foreign missions.*" I recommend that office continue as it has been developed by Father Ubillus, but with a particular focus on the international missions of the Congregation and the areas of mission of the different provinces that ask for assistance.

Another Assistant would be the delegate for the Vincentian Family. Therefore we would eliminate a role within the curia itself. I have discussed this with Father Manny Ginete, who in my opinion, has done an excellent job and received a very positive evaluation from the council in this matter. I think that the mandate from the

General Assembly of 1998 has been fulfilled, at least a basis is established, the sense of being a Vincentian Family is clear. It is more highly developed in some places over others, but that is only because of the history and the experience has been greater. But if one of the Assistants General becomes a delegate for the Vincentian Family he would continue to develop or promote that sense of Vincentian Family in the Congregation of the Mission.

Taken from our Visitors meeting that focused mostly on ongoing formation and as well initial formation, another Assistant would be responsible for this area. It is interesting that the majority of congregations have different assistants, particularly to deal with initial and ongoing formation. I think that it is important, especially when we want to focus on our main resource which is the confreres. It has been heard any number of times from the different reports we receive from provinces that one of our greatest weakness that we need to address is precisely the formation of our own, both at the initial and ongoing stages.

A fifth Assistant will be responsible for the relations with the Union of Superiors General and issues such as Justice and Peace and Integrity of Creation. Father Alfredo Becerra, who is our archivist and librarian at the curia, has done an excellent job in assisting me in this area. I hope that he would be able to assist one of our Assistants as well. It seems to me that we need to have a focus that takes us beyond the internal structure of the Congregation of the Mission. We need to know those whom we serve and the issues that touch their lives. In the other two Assemblies that I have participated in, we have tried having more consciously present to us the reality of the poor. To say that the General Assembly, for example, is not a place to talk about our commitment with the poor or the reality in which the poor are living would stifle any lines of action that we might want to put forth. That Assistant would help keep us in touch with the world as it is, and especially the plight and reality of the poor.

I have found particularly helpful in my six years the reports from our representative at the United Nations, because the working groups that he is involved in always are about major issues and how they affect the poor. As I said in the most recent *tempo forte* circular, any Vincentian who is not conscious of what the major issues are today and how they affect the poor is lacking in his witness as a Vincentian.

The number and geographic representation of the Assistants, Constitution 116 § 2 not only says "*at least four in number*" but "*from different provinces are elected for a six-year term.*" I would hope that there would be a confrere from Africa on the council as well as from Asia-Pacific, one from Latin America, two from Europe, that is

representing Eastern Europe as well as Western Europe, and one from the United States. That is six people: Superior General, Vicar General, four Assistants. I think that it is possible and it is time we move in that direction. It does not mean in any way that the Assistants will be representing only the interests of their particular geographical area, but we will have representation from the world-wide Congregation who can help speak to and address the issues that confront us.

The final recommendation *ad intra* has to do with fund-raising. It is recommended to the new administration that the Superior General be more directly involved in the question of fund-raising especially for the patrimonial funds of the provinces in development. When people want to give donations in a large amount of money, often they want to see the head of the organization. That is the reason behind this which I fully support.

With regard to *ad extra*, further recommendations to add to what I have already said, regarding the provinces. A major issue for the future continues to be the need to take into consideration the question of reconfiguration, owing to the fact that we have to be as efficient as possible in our evangelization and service of the poor. We do so by cutting down on personnel in administration, increasing the manpower available to serve the poor, making greater efforts at interprovincial collaboration and being able to move beyond where at times, perhaps, we have grown comfortable, to serving those on the margins. The dialog regarding reconfiguration has been left in the hands of the provinces themselves, but with encouragement of this administration and will continue to be a recommendation for the next administration. This is not a matter that deals only with the Congregation of the Mission, it is a major issue of all the congregations, especially the larger congregations, as many are trying to address the question of their mission and being creatively faithful to it. Many times it involves a greater collaboration and a willingness to change the structures that sometimes impede that goal from being accomplished. The issue has been addressed in a number of provincial assemblies and other places as well and it will be a part of this General Assembly's discussions at different moments.

Regarding the economic situation of the Congregation, Constitution 148 § 2 dealing with goods says: "*The Congregation of the Mission embraces a communitarian form of evangelical poverty in that all goods of the Congregation are held in common, and the Congregation uses them to pursue and attain its own purpose more successfully.*" I simply raise this question here for the next administration: how true is this constitutional article as we look at the reality of the Congregation of the Mission? As we will hear in the Economy

General's report, many of our provinces are very generous in their giving to provinces in development. But I would recommend to the next administration to help the provinces move beyond a question of generosity and see this solidarity with the provinces in development as a question of justice, sharing as best as possible so that we truly hold in common all the goods. I believe that this will make us more effective as well as faithful in our service of the mission.

We will take a few minutes for reflection and quiet listening to music while viewing some pictures.

I would like to list some conclusions, matters that I consider of utmost importance that do not need much explanation because they are clear. We need to challenge ourselves as we move into the next six years with a serious examination of what I am about to say.

First: Know and live the Constitutions and Statutes of the Congregation of the Mission. With this alone things will be better than they are now and above all for the poor. Specifically:

- There is the need to be more consistent and faithful to one hour daily of meditation (see C 47 § 1).
- The need to be serious in our development of living community plans. We are a community for mission. If community is not taken seriously then we can hardly be faithfully creative to the mission (C 27 / S 16).
- All goods are held in common (C 148 § 2). The importance of solidarity from a justice perspective.
- Creativity in our forms of evangelization would involve greater collaboration at the interprovincial and international levels of the Congregation and with the Vincentian Family as well as with other ecclesial and non-ecclesial organizations that have ends similar to ours.

Before we move on to discussion, then the break, and then question and answers, a few words to you as delegates to the General Assembly, particularly to those who are here for the first time. Do not let the rules and regulations that you find in the Directory stifle you from participating fully in the dialog that occurs in this aula as well as in discussion groups throughout the three weeks of the General Assembly. I feel that this Assembly will only be successful if we truly work from a communion and participation perspective.

Let us pray that we be open to the Spirit as we chose those who are to be our leaders for these next six years, taking seriously the need to have a Superior General who is willing to be the spiritual animator of the Congregation of the Mission and the Vincentian Family, following the direction that we have already been given in these modern times of the Congregation. In addition, it is of the

utmost importance that the Superior General have a General Council that supports him and helps him to follow through on what he hears as the issues of utmost importance manifested in this Assembly as well as manifested in the reality of the Congregation today as I have tried to present in this report.

“May this be a time of listening and dialog, of communion and joy, so that we can give prophetic witness of God’s love in the whole world. Living in the state of ongoing renewal, we can then be signs of creative fidelity to the mission.”

Thank you.